



STILL SERVING

Published by the Retiree Activities Office, Bolling AFB, D.C.

February 2005

SBP OFFSET BEGINS 3½-YEAR PHASEOUT IN OCTOBER

One of the key provisions of this year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is the elimination of the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) age 62 offset over a period of 3½ years. The offset reduces the SBP annuity from 55 percent to 35 percent when the annuitant reaches age 62 and becomes eligible for Social Security payments based on the retired members work record. Starting in October, about 270,000 SBP recipients will see the first of four increases take effect: from 35 to 40 percent; in April 2006, to 45 percent; April 2007, to 50 percent; and April 2008, 55 percent. The NDAA also provides a one-year enrollment opportunity beginning in October for those qualified retirees not currently enrolled in SBP. Details are expected to be announced shortly. It appears that the law will be implemented by requiring payment of all back premiums plus interest as an enrollment requirement. Congress did not address the age-70, 30-enrollment years "paid-up" SBP provision. It remains effective in 2008. Survivor benefit protection for military spouses started in 1953 with the Contingency Option Plan. The self-supporting plan was expensive and participants had to commit to it by the end of their 17th year of service. The name was changed in 1961 to the Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan (RSFPP). Only 15 percent of retirees enrolled. In 1972, Congress replaced RSFPP with the government-subsidized Survivor Benefit Plan. About half of those enrolled in RSFPP opted for SBP.

FEWER CRSC APPLICATIONS THAN EXPECTED - An anticipated increase in applications for Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) pay when the benefit was expanded to include all combat or related disabilities rated as service-connected by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at 10 percent or higher, has not happened. The CRSC staff in the Air Force Personnel Center at Randolph AFB, Tex., believes the lack of participation may be because many retired members have not heard about the program. Also, some may confuse the CRSC criteria with Concurrent Retirement Disability Payments (CRDP). The CRSC Branch has processed more than 11,800 applications with an approval rate of 66 percent. This number of applications is a drop in the bucket compared to the number that might be eligible — estimated between 50,000 and 100,000. CRSC is awarded to active-duty military retirees with 20 years or more active duty or Reservists and Air Guardsmen who have retired at age 60 and have a VA disability, which may be combat related. Since last April, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service has received almost 2,000 approved retiree applications each month from all services. More than 22,000 military retirees had received CRSC payments totaling \$350 million by the end of the year. Although CRSC specifically addresses "combat-related" disabilities, retirees who developed disabilities from other than actual combat may be eligible. Disabilities due to exposure to Agent Orange, combat training, simulated war exercises, parachuting and munitions demolition, along with other hazardous service, are examples that may be compensated. Eligible retirees may also receive individual Unemployment (IU) payments and increased CRSC adjusted for dependents that were not provided in the original provision. Veterans receiving VA compensation, even those already receiving CRDP, should send in all documentation, which addresses how the disability came about and let the CRSC staff determine if the disabilities qualify for the program. Retired members may not receive CRDP and CRSC concurrently. Because CRSC is nontaxable, it may be more beneficial. Those eligible for both can determine on an annual basis, which is best. Early selections may be enhanced later as CRDP is phased in over a 10-year period. Send documents to Disability Division (CRSC) 550 C Street West, Suite 6, Randolph AFB, TX 78150-4708. For more information, retirees should call the CRSC Branch at (210) 565-1600 or the AFPC Contact Center toll free 1 (866) 229-7074. Information and applications are available at base military personnel flights or online at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/crsc/>.

SOCIAL SECURITY, RETIRED PAY INCREASED - Monthly Social Security and Supplemental Security Income benefits for more than 52 million Americans are up 2.7 percent this year. Also benefiting from the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) are military retired members, Survivor Benefit Plan annuitants and individuals receiving VA compensation. The increase is the largest since a 3.5 percent adjustment in 2001. Last year's COLA was 2.4 percent. Based on the increase, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) is increased to \$90,000 from 87,900. Of the estimated 159 million workers who will pay Social Security taxes this year, about 9.9 million will pay higher taxes. No one's Social Security benefit is decreased as a result of the 2005 Medicare Part B premium increase. By law, the Part B premium increase cannot be larger than a beneficiary's COLA increase. The adjustment reflects inflation over the past year as tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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ISSUES CONSIDERED FOR COUNCIL MEETING - Retirees and family members are invited to submit issues for consideration by the Air Force Retiree Council. While the Retiree Activities Office remains the primary point of contact for such matters, interested parties may also express their views at a meeting at Andrews AFB, Md., February 8. Directors and RAO staff members from Andrews, Bolling and Dover AFBs will meet at the Andrews Club at 10 a.m. with CMSgt. (Ret.) Chuck Lucas, the council's Area XII representative. The meeting is open to all interested parties. Directors will discuss issues brought to their attention in the past year. Those determined to warrant council attention are formatted for dispatch to the Air Force Retiree Office at Randolph AFB, Tex. Submissions are due by the end of March. The Randolph office consolidates them with those of the other 12 areas for presentation at the June 7-10 meetings. In recent years, Tricare For Life, Concurrent Receipt, Survivor Benefit Plan and space-available base lodging have been among the hundreds of issues researched by the council. Priority issues are forwarded to the Chief of Staff and the Air Staff with recommendations.



Colonel (ret) Moser

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Col. (ret) John Moser

Director, Retiree Activities Office, Bolling AFB DC

As we move forward into a super 2005, we are back at the old stand and *Still Serving* has been institutionalized as a 3-time yearly publication. It is my intent for you to receive this newsletter in early February, June and October. Our popular Dental Saturday is planned for sometime in July (to be announced in the June edition) and Retiree Day is scheduled for November 19. Mark your calendar now. My main drive for the RAO this year is increasing manpower. Our relationship with the active force is outstanding — they support us and we support them. And our efforts are appreciated. We are represented in the 11th Logistics Readiness Squadron, the Air Force History Office, in the Bolling Dental Clinic and in staffing our office. But, our ranks are thinning. We need more personnel to stay ahead of the power curve. There is much more we can and should participate in. The Medical Group needs all the help they can get. Volunteers are needed to provide the necessary administrative support to keep them functioning effectively and efficiently. They can use you at the time of your choosing, at least one 5-hour tour each week and, trust me, you will be appreciated and you will make an important contribution.

The History Office is totally dependent upon our efforts — our volunteers do all their own research. Without us, historical requests from the public would not be answered. I worked there when I started as a volunteer in 1996. It is a most satisfying endeavor and you really feel wanted when responding to the numerous inquiries. It is intellectually challenging as well as making you feel good about yourself. And staffing our RAO is an absolute necessity. We receive numerous calls and we have walk-ins. All need help and personal assistance. Each day requires two volunteers. I have numerous openings. I need your help!!! You have read the same message in the past, and it has worked, somewhat. When I started out as director, we had about 22 volunteers. Since then, we have been barely holding our own. Among us, we have been contributing more than 5,500 volunteer hours annually. I would like to increase that by at least 10 percent this year. The need for our expertise and for our knowledge of what makes the Air Force work is incalculable. The demands put on the active force and attendant monetary limitations make it mandatory that we participate and help. IT REALLY IS PAY BACK TIME. Call me at (202) 767-5244. We need you.

SHOPLIFTING — IT'S NOT WORTH IT

By Capt. Diane Weed

HQ AAFES Public Affairs

Shoplifting is a crime that can cost a military member dearly. This includes our retirees and their family members.

"Whatever excuses people come up with to justify their actions, the fact remains that none of them are good enough reasons to risk the stain on the family," said Steve Bass, HQ AAFES loss prevention manager. Military exchanges spend millions of dollars each year to foil shoplifters, including measures to deter and detect thefts, according to Bass. The Army & Air Force Exchange Service apprehends more than 10,000 shoplifters each year. They are turned over to base security for criminal and Uniform Code of Military Justice action. On top of those actions, AAFES and other federal retailers are authorized to collect a \$200 administrative fee on top of the value of the shoplifted items. This fee offsets the expenses incurred from shoplifting. Sponsors are financially responsible for their family members' actions, under the terms of the AAFES program. Parents of minors caught shoplifting will be billed for all costs. These administrative charges are separate from any criminal prosecution or military disciplinary action.

"Unfortunately, when individuals steal, they commit a crime against themselves, their family members, other soldiers and airmen, and the military community," said Brig. Gen. Toreaser Steele, AAFES vice commander. "It's a real shame since they are taking money out of the hands of commanders who use the AAFES dividend to improve quality of life activities. They seriously reduce dollars given back from sales of this \$7.3 billion organization, that's dedicated to ensuring the quality of life for all troops everywhere, going where they go and being of value to them everyday."

OLDER SPOUSES, SURVIVORS GET PERMANENT ID CARDS - As a part of the Defense Authorization Act, Congress eased the burden of ID card renewal for older spouses and survivors. Beginning this year, retiree spouses and survivors age 75 and older are able to obtain permanent ID cards. Military retirees already receive ID cards with no expiration date. Dependents and survivors have had to continue to renew their ID cards every four years. Many Medicare-eligible family members let their ID cards expire, creating eligibility questions. Tricare For Life and Tricare Senior Pharmacy require valid ID cards. The card "shall be issued upon expiration, after the retiree dependent attains 75 years of age, or earlier, upon request of such retiree dependent after attaining age 75."



STILL SERVING

Still Serving is published in October, February and June by the Retiree Activities Office, Bolling AFB DC to provide retirees and family members information affecting the military retiree community. Contents are not necessarily the official views, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, Department of Defense or Department of the Air Force.

Comments may be directed to the Bolling AFB Retiree Activities Office, 11 Mission Support Group/CVR, 110 Luke Avenue, Suite 302, Bolling AFB DC 20032. Phone (202) 767-5244. E-Mail Retact@Bolling.AF.Mil. FAX (202) 404-5342. Still Serving can now be seen at the following link: http://www.bolling.af.mil/orgs/Tenants/RAO/index_RAO.htm

AIR FORCE DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON RETURNS

The Air Force District of Washington (AFDW) has been reactivated to more effectively support the war on terrorism and align its command structure in the National Capital Region with other military services. "This gives the Air Force a 'single voice' for working cross-service issues throughout the National Capital Region and improve our support level to the newly established joint force headquarters," said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John P. Jumper. The U.S. Northern Command established the Joint Force Headquarters-National Capital Region at Fort McNair last year. AFDW is the Air Force component. It is located at Bolling AFB and includes the 11th Wing as well as other Air Force units assigned and attached supporting the joint force headquarters. Bolling was the home of AFDW during its existence from 1985 to 1994.

The Joint Force Headquarters, National Capitol Region plans and coordinates military assistance to homeland defense and civil support in the District of Columbia and the Maryland and Virginia suburban counties. It coordinates and acts as liaison with local law enforcement and first responders. The command also works with state and federal entities, ranging from the White House Military Office to the U.S. Park Police.

BOLLING ACCESS MORE RESTRICTIVE – Access to Bolling AFB has become more restrictive as the base acquires new missions and tightens its force-protection posture. New missions for the 11th Wing involving the new Joint Force Headquarters-National Capital Region, reactivation of the Air Force District of Washington and the completion of the Defense Intelligence Agency's new addition dictate increased security measures. While base access for ID-cardholders and those with a valid need for access such as contractors, vendors, etc., is not affected, visitor access for unofficial events is further restricted. ID cardholders no longer have unlimited sponsorship privileges. They may not individually sponsor hundreds of visitors at a time for recurring events. Unescorted access for non-ID-cardholders to base facilities like Potomac Lanes and the Bolling Clubs has been significantly reduced to further enhance base security.

PENTAGON VISITS A THING OF THE PAST - All federal agencies enforce stringent security measures. The Pentagon Force Protection Agency controls access to the Pentagon through the Pentagon Pass Office. Military retirees, long accustomed to being admitted to the Pentagon on their ID cards, are no longer granted unescorted access. Alternate sources are encouraged for visits to such places as the barbershop, bank, credit union, pharmacy or impulse buying on the concourse. For entrance procedures, call (703) 697-9327.

JUDGE DISMISSES FORMER SPOUSE LAWSUIT - The U.S. Federal District Court in Alexandria, Va., dismissed a lawsuit brought by the Uniformed Litigation Support Group (ULSG) against the Secretary of Defense, seeking to overturn the Uniformed Services Former Spouse Protection Act (USFSPA). ULSG had filed the suit on behalf of 58 retirees and service members alleging that the law requiring division of military retired pay with a former spouse violates constitutional due process and equal protection rights. The ULSG seeks a return to the 1981 policy, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that divorce courts could not touch veterans' retainer or retirement pay. The USFSPA annulled that ruling. Judge James C. Cacheris ruled that the lawsuit belongs in state courts since federal courts (with the exception of the Supreme Court) do not have subject matter jurisdiction over the case. The judge held that plaintiffs are required to sue states individually because divorce law is a state-level issue. He also ruled that ULSG failed to show that it had the "standing" required to file this lawsuit. ULSG plans to appeal this ruling to the United States Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va.

'FULL CONCURRENT RECEIPT FOR 14,000 - The FY 2005 Defense Authorization Act authorizes full concurrent receipt of retired pay and veterans' disability compensation for 14,000 retirees with 100 percent VA (non-combat) disability ratings, as of January 2005. This group is exempted from the 10-year phase-in schedule that will gradually restore full retired pay for other retirees with non-combat-related disabilities rated at 50 percent or higher. About 30,000 retirees being paid at the 100 percent disability rate because VA rated them as "unemployable" remain under the 10-year phase-in schedule.

FLOATING' CHECKS SUNK - The practice of "floating" a check until payday is a thing of the past as a result of the new federal Check Clearing for the 21st Century Act, also known as Check 21. "Check floating" occurs when people write checks a few days before payday, figuring that by the time their paychecks hit the bank, there will be money in the accounts to cover them. With Check 21, money is withdrawn immediately from a person's account when a check is written. Debits to a checking account occur in minutes. Canceled checks as record-keeping devices are also on the way out. Banks will replace canceled checks with paper copies of electronic images of an original check. Consumers probably will not be able to access funds from deposits any sooner. The new law does not shorten check hold times for banks.



UTILITY UNIFORM GETS EXTENDED TEST - Responding to airmen's feedback, Air Force leaders unveiled an alternative utility uniform color scheme and pattern as part of an ongoing wear-test. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John P. Jumper and CMSAF Gerald R. Murray are wearing the latest test version of the uniform during visits to field units. The most striking change is the switch from a deep blue, gray and green color scheme to a more subdued mix of tan, blue and two shades of green with a pixelated tiger-striped pattern. More than 700 people at 32 installations are testing the uniform. The original plan called for 300 testers, but uniform board decided to increase the number of testers to gain more exposure and collect more test data. "The wash and wear uniform is easier and cheaper to maintain," said SMSgt. Jacqueline Dean, uniform board superintendent. "The permanent-press treatment eliminates the need for ironing, and home washing can save an airman from \$180 to \$240 in laundry costs over the course of a year."

USAF Photo by TSgt. David A. Jablonski

Revised colors on utility uniform include tan, blue and two shades of green in a pixelated tiger-stripe pattern.

AIR FORCE NEWS SUBSCRIPTIONS TOP 100,000 - For the first time since Air Force Link, the Air Force's official Web site, was introduced nearly 10 years ago, the number of subscribers to its electronic news and information products has exceeded 100,000. The growth is attributed to the Web site's continuing popularity, combined with an ever-increasing growth of diverse forms available to users for getting news and information about the Air Force, said Kim McDonald, director of Air Force News Service. With the addition of AF Today, a daily e-mail summary of news stories, video and audio news reports, the Air Force News Service products subscriber list grows by several hundred every week. Air Force News Service is the official news service of the Air Force. Products available through the Air Force's official Web site, at www.af.mil, include Air Force Print News, Air Force Television News, Air Force Policy Letter Digest, AF Today, Airman magazine and Commander's Call Topics. Several other e-mail subscriptions are available, including major command news products. All products are available by clicking on the "subscribe" tab on the Air Force Link home page, or by going to www.af.mil/subscribe.

MANY CHANGES IN NEW PERSONNEL SYSTEM - The National Security Personnel System (NSPS) is scheduled to start this summer for an initial 100,000 Department of Defense employees. Air Force personnel specialists are visiting bases to explain the system that will eventually manage all 650,000 DOD employees. Base visits are playing a key role in explaining the most significant changes to the civil service system since the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. The current system is deemed inadequate in today's national security environment. Inadequacies include a slow hiring process that is adversely affecting recruiting; outstanding performers being paid the same as poor performers; limited flexibility to hire, reassign and reward employees; and limited accountability of poor performers or managers. Significant changes from the current system to the NSPS include compensating employees and supervisors based on performance and contribution to the mission, and creating a work force that can be easily sized, shaped and deployed to meet changing mission requirements.

NEW BRAC SUPPORTS DOD TRANSFORMATION - The 2005 base realignment and closure (BRAC) initiative will directly contribute to DoD's transformation efforts. Raymond DuBois, deputy undersecretary of defense for installations and environment, said a key component of this year's BRAC consideration involves weighing an installation's military value in view of how it contributes to and accommodates joint operations. Any new base closures would take into account the need to maintain a military "surge" capacity to deal with potential future threats, DuBois said. BRACs conducted between 1988 and 1995 closed 97 military bases and realigned 57 others. Officials estimate DoD still carries about 23 percent excess infrastructure. Previous BRACs provided \$7 billion in annual savings to DoD, DuBois recalled. But, he noted, DoD still has \$660 billion tied up in property inventory. The Defense Department needs "to free up that kind of investment capital to support our troops in areas where those resources are needed," he said. Final BRAC recommendations will be presented in the spring.

TASK FORCE FOCUSES ON EXCHANGE TRANSFORMATION - A Unified Exchange Task Force (UETF), established by the Department of Defense in 2003, is tasked with providing recommendations on how best to organize the exchange system going forward and how to transition from service-by-service exchanges to inter-service shared retail offerings. The group must ensure that the exchange benefit is sustained and enhanced and that exchanges will continue to be able to provide dividends to the military service morale, welfare and recreation programs (i.e. generate enough revenue to fund other leisure programs). While the task force initially looked at consolidating the three existing systems into a single organization, the problems inherent in that approach led DoD to refocus the task force's efforts. That means seeking the best ways to combine or co-develop certain functions (accounting, personnel, information technology, logistics, etc.) that all three exchange systems agree can be made more efficient without impinging on unique service needs. The DoD expects to provide formal recommendations to Congress in the fall, with Congressional hearings and public comments to follow. More information about the task force and its mission is available at www.unifiedexchange.org.



COMMISSARIES HELP AWARD SCHOLARSHIPS - Applications for Scholarships for Military Children, administered by Fisher House Foundation and funded by manufacturers and industry supporting commissaries, must be received by February 16. The program has awarded more than \$3 million through nearly 2,000 scholarships to sons and daughters of military retirees, active-duty service members and Guard and Reserve members. Applications are available at commissaries or online at <http://www.militaryscholar.org>. Applications, which must include an essay on how the heightened awareness of terrorism has impacted the student's life, are due at commissaries February 16. At least one \$1,500 scholarship will be awarded at every commissary location with qualified applicants. The scholarship program is open to unmarried children under the age of 21 (23 if enrolled in school). Applicants must be planning to attend, or already attending, an accredited college or university full-time in the fall term or enrolled in a program of studies designed to transfer into a four-year program.

INTERNET COUPONS STRETCH COMMISSARY SAVINGS - Commissary shoppers are among the top coupon clippers in the world, but the "clipping" part may some day be history. The Defense Commissary Agency is helping customers increase their savings by making Internet coupon links available under a new section of the agency's Web site. Along with top Web sites for military grocery coupons, the new section that offers a choice of English or Spanish; and for customers who prefer more traditional coupons, another link offers commissary shoppers the opportunity to sign up for coupons by mail. Military commissaries are among the top five retailers redeeming grocery coupons. The most common coupons offered are inserts, typically found in Sunday newspapers or made available at the commissary. But the use of Internet coupons has grown substantially. All 273 commissaries accept computer-generated Internet coupons as long as they have a bar code for scanning purposes, and the coupons do not offer free product.

INTEREST RATE AT 10 PERCENT - The interest rate for the Military STAR card in the Exchange Credit Program is 10 percent. It was increased by .25 percentage points after the Federal Reserve raised its prime rate to 5 percent. Military STAR card terms state that the interest rate is based upon the current prime rate plus 5 percent. Purchases after the January billing statement reflected the revised interest rate. The rate increase does not apply to zero-interest Military Clothing Plans, special promotions already in existence or to deployed customers whose balances are treated under special conditions.

AAFES PHONE CARD BEST VALUE - Just about any phone card will work for service members calling the United States from Southwest Asia. The big question is which card offers the lowest per-minute talking charges. Thanks to an exclusive contract with AT&T, DoD exchanges offer a card that provides the lowest fees for calls placed from AT&T phone centers in Southwest Asia. The Military Exchange Prepaid Global 550-unit phone card offers lower per-minute rates than other prepaid cards, including AT&T prepaid cards sold by other retailers. If the card is purchased in the United States, the per-minute fees are 28 cents a minute from Iraq or Afghanistan and 21 cents a minute from Kuwait. If the deployed service member buys the card in Southwest Asia, the rates are even lower, 25 cents a minute from Iraq and Afghanistan and 19 cents a minute from Kuwait. This compares to as much as 40 cents per minute charged by some phone-card companies after converting calling units to actual calling minutes. Additional features include: no connection fee for calls placed, cards never expire, and the purchaser has the option of "recharging them" so the recipient doesn't run out of calling minutes. Cards are available through all military exchanges. For more details, visit the AAFES, NEX or Marine Corps Exchange Web sites or call 1 800 527-2345.

VEHICLE REGISTRANTS OVERWHELM RETIREE DAY PROGRAM

Undeterred by the absence of influenza shots, more than 300 retirees and family members filled the Washington Room of the Bolling Club in October for the Retiree Appreciation Day program. The "jewel" of the health screenings was supplanted by the opportunity to register motor vehicles on base. The supply of 50 decals was exhausted within an hour.

USAF Photos by Thom Dennis



Capt. Edithann Graham, assisted by Amn. Raul Barfield check retiree for oral cancer.



Col. Duane Jones, 11th Wing commander, points out value of Still Serving newsletter.



Numerous questions from the audience were directed to program presenters.

It was the third year Base Security had provided vehicle registration services under the same roof with the main Retiree Day program. Previously, special Saturday hours were offered attendees at the Base Visitors' Center. Taking advantage of the opportunity to avoid weekday crowds at the Visitors' Center, applicants were lined up at the club before the processor had arrived.

"We were a bit overwhelmed," said Col. (ret.) John Moser, director of the Bolling Retiree Activities Office (RAO). "Based on requests in previous years, we did not expect more than 50 applicants. We're sorry that some were turned away. It won't happen again."

"We were pleased that our program selections were on the money. We try hard each year to hit those areas of most interest to our clientele." Customer Service reported that 18 dependents made use of special hours to renew ID cards.

Convenient "shots and decals" have become popular segments to Bolling's annual program. They have been streamlined in recent years in response to feedback in critiques completed by attendees. Retiree Day, a longtime summer event at Bolling, was shifted to the fall several years ago to coincide with the military's annual flu shot schedule. A nationwide shortage of serum last fall withheld Defense Department distribution until mid-November.

More than a hundred attendees took advantage of other health screenings provided by Bolling's 11th Medical Group doctors and technicians. Included were tests for hypertension, glaucoma, osteoporosis and oral cancer. In addition, Ms. Nancy Leggett, director of the Base Wellness Clinic, distributed copies of "Taking Care After 50," a 375-page self-care guide for seniors. Ms. Leggett has volunteered her services at 20 Retiree Day programs at Bolling.

Col. Duane Jones, 11th Wing commander, welcomed the assemblage and used the opportunity to explain plans for activities in the new coloacted club. Throughout the Air Force, retirees make up the bulk of patronage in base clubs. Structural problems condemned Bolling's Enlisted Club and for the past year the former Officers' Club has served all grades.

Colonel Jones acknowledged this has infringed on long-held military traditions. He said that base officials are determined to find a solution that will ease this concern while providing equal club services for all. He cited the value of retiree input in helping planners achieve this goal.

Bolling's salute to retirees had unexpected competition. A similar program was conducted the same day at neighboring Andrews AFB. It was the first Retiree Day at Andrews in 10 years. SMSgt. (Ret.) John Neves, director of the Andrews RAO, was adamant in resurrecting the program. "I hated to go on the same day as Bolling, but it was the only date available at the club." More than 450 turned out for the Andrews program.

Early planning should eliminate the conflict this year. Andrews has scheduled its Retiree Day for November 5 and Bolling, November 19. Both dates indicate another attempt to include flu shots for all comers.



Emcee Col. (ret) John Moser, left, and keynote speaker Tom Philpott select door prize numbers.

RETIREEES RIDE HIGH AMID CHANGE IN STRUCTURE - Desks were shuffled and a friend of Air Force retirees concluded a second career, but the heart of the Air Force retiree program heads into the new year as strong as ever. The Retiree and Family Matters Division in the Air Force Personnel Center at Randolph AFB, Tex., has been reorganized. The division's Retiree Services Branch merged with the Retirements and Services Division and the Directorate of Force Operations absorbed the balance of the division. Pat Peek remains as chief of the Retiree Services Branch, along with her right and left arms, Bill Turner and Bill Torrey, both Air Force retirees. Peek also continues as overseer of the Survivor Benefit Plan along with Maureen Williams and Janice Jarzombek. Amid all of the above, retired Air Force Col. Bruce Creller ended a second career. He had served as chief of the Retiree and Family Matters Division since 1996. His second retirement qualifies him for a weekly tour at a San Antonio-area Retiree Activities Office. Peek and staff now report to Col. Phil Odom, chief of the Retirements and Separations Division.

CUSTOMERS RATE COMMISSARIES HIGH - Customers gave commissaries all-time high grades in a Defense Commissary Agency satisfaction survey. "The survey results show our customers like the service we provide - they like it a lot," said Patrick B. Nixon, DeCA's chief executive officer. "Any military service member who hasn't been in one of our stores lately is invited to experience what our customers say is very good. The survey conducted at all commissaries collected responses to 14 questions from more than 21,000 customers. The highest overall marks ever - 4.55 out of 5 - and marks were up for all 14 questions compared to a customer survey conducted in 2003. The survey is a tool to help individual stores measure improvements and identify opportunities for improvement. Employees got the greatest attention. They gave "Courteous Friendly and Helpful Employees" their highest rating - 4.75. The other highest mark was for "Overall Satisfaction," which received 4.68.

AIR FORCE RETIREE COUNCIL DATES TO 1972

The Air Force Retiree Council was established in 1972 with the first meeting in 1973 chaired by the late Brig. Gen. Roy Casbeer. There have been 10 chairmen since, including four co-chairs established by the Air Force Chief of Staff in 1999. The council co-chairs are the Chief of Staff's liaison with the retiree community. They work directly for the chief. The council meets annually at the Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Tex., to discuss retiree issues. The council's findings are reported directly to the chief. The Council is comprised of the co-chairmen, 13 members who represent geographic areas within the continental United States, and a representative from the Pacific and European areas. Currently, there are two at large members, one dealing principally with health care matters and the other with issues affecting surviving spouses. There are 114 Retiree Activities Offices and each council member oversees the retiree activities programs within his/her respective area of responsibility. The co-chairmen play an active role in the identification and selection of council members. CMSgt. Charles E. Lucas, Springfield, Va., is the Area XII director, representing RAOs at Andrews AFB, Md., Bolling AFB, D.C. and Dover AFB, Del.



CMSAF Finch

He can be reached at (202) 767-5244 or via e-mail at retact@bolling.af.mil. At the invitation of local commanders and Retiree Activities Office directors, the co-chairmen visit Air Force installations to speak about issues concerning retirees and their family members. They maintain contact with many military associations and obtain their views on retiree matters. They also meet with retiree council co-chairmen from the other services to discuss issues that are common to all military retirees. Former chairmen: General Casbeer, 1973-1974; Brig. Gen. Robert E. Brofft, 1975-1978; Maj. Gen. Rene J. Dupont, 1979-1982; Maj. Gen. Abraham J. Dreiseszun, 1983-1986; Maj. Gen. Travis R. McNeil, 1987-1992; Maj. Gen. William J. Porter, 1993-1996; Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force James M. McCoy, 1997-1998; Lt. Gen. Everett H. Pratt and CMSAF Eric W. Benken, 1999-2002. Incumbents are Lt. Gen. Donald L. Peterson and CMSAF Frederick J. (Jim) Finch.



LtGen Peterson

AIR FORCE MEMORIAL MOVES AHEAD - Soaring 270 feet into the sky over America's capital, three

stainless-steel spires forming an equilateral triangle will memorialize the U.S. Air Force. Groundbreaking and site dedication ceremonies for the Air Force Memorial were held in September at the site overlooking the Pentagon in Arlington, Va. The memorial site is the current Navy Annex south of the Pentagon and next to Arlington National Cemetery. Demolition of the Navy buildings began in October. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John P. Jumper explained the significance of the memorial's site. "That first (test) flight demonstrated (to the Army) by the Wright Brothers took off right over there on the ridge at Fort Myer, and they flew around a pylon ... and returned," General Jumper said, gesturing to the nearby Army installation. "It was a demonstration of the most meager capability, but it turned into what we have today that we're most proud of, as we went higher, faster and farther through the decades that have intervened," he said. The Air Force Memorial Foundation is still accepting donations. Contributions for the remaining \$6 million are needed to dedicate the memorial in September 2006. To make a tax-exempt contribution, or to learn more about the memorial, visit www.airforcememorial.org.

JROTC SEEKS INSTRUCTORS - Air Force members who have retired within the past five years may want to look to Air Force Junior ROTC before storing their uniforms. The program will add 201 units by fall 2007, creating a need for an additional 402 aerospace science instructors to teach in high-school classrooms worldwide. Many instructors find their relationships with the students, schools and communities the most satisfying aspect of the job. Early this year, 50 Air Force JROTC units will open with at least 100 new instructors. In 2006 and 2007, another 75 and 76 units, respectively, will open. People from all career fields are needed. Active-duty airmen may apply when they are within six months of their retirement date. In some instances, the five-year date of retirement can be waived up to 10 years. Waiver consideration is based on the program needs and applicant qualifications. Instructors wear the Air Force uniform and are expected to maintain appearance standards. In addition, they receive, as a minimum, a salary equal to the difference between their retired pay and their active-duty pay and allowances. For more information, call the Air Force JROTC division toll free at 1 866 235-7682, ext. 7742. Applicants may also write: HQ AFOATS/JRI, 551 E. Maxwell Blvd, Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6106.

NEW SERVICES FOR MYPAY USERS - Military retirees using the myPay system have been advised by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service that if they want DFAS to continue to print and mail paper documents, they must initiate the action. The myPay service provides convenience, privacy, security, and the capability to view and print personal retirement account information 24 hours a day. In addition, myPay also provides on-line availability of the Tax Form 1099R and the annual retiree account statement. DFAS does not routinely print and mail these documents. myPay users can assign a "restricted access PIN" to a designated individual to view the information, but cannot make any changes to the allotments or account information; they may also add a personal e-mail address, so users are notified of pay changes and other items of interest. myPay has nearly 3 million users with customized personal identification numbers (PIN) and serves all military members, military retirees and annuitants, Department of Defense civilian employees and Department of Energy employees. Members of the retiree community who do not have myPay accounts are encouraged visit the DFAS myPay web site at <https://mypay.dfas.mil> and click on Need a New PIN. Retired members may also call the customer contact center at 1 800 321-1080 between 7 a.m., and 7:30 p.m. to select the hard-copy option associated with each document you want mailed.

INTEREST-FREE LOANS OFFERED UNDERGRADUATES - More than 1,100 students will receive up to \$4,000 each in interest-free loans from the Military Officers Association of America's (MOAA) Scholarship Fund for the current school year. About 400 students will be first-time recipients. The loans are awarded annually for up to five years of undergraduate study. Applicants must be children of MOAA members or of enlisted service members and be under the age of 24. Application deadline is noon, March 1. If an applicant served in a uniformed Service before completing college, however, the maximum age for eligibility is increased by the number of years served, up to five years. Applicants may be graduating high school seniors or full-time college students working toward their first baccalaureate degree. Qualified students with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale are considered for selection based on their scholastic ability, potential, character qualities, participation in extracurricular and community activities, as well as financial need. MOAA also will award 25 grants to college seniors who are current loan recipients in the program, 10 grants to children of deceased retired officers, and 16 grants to children whose military parent died in active service. Five of the 25 senior grants will be for \$5,000 and the others for \$4,000 each. Also, 505 students who are Designated Scholars will receive a \$3,500 interest-free loan and a \$500 grant. For complete information, visit www.MOAA.org/education or email edassist@MOAA.org.

DOD EXPANDS FLU VACCINE PROGRAM - The Defense Department has expanded its flu vaccination program to include people as young as age 50 and those in close contact with those at high risk of getting the flu. DoD has sufficient units of vaccine available to administer to people at lower risk. Extra shipments of Flu Mist, a nasal spray flu vaccine, also were shipped to recruiting stations to make sure recruits get their vaccines. January and February tend to be peak flu months because the weather forces people to spend more time indoors in confined spaces. This environment enables the flu virus to quickly spread. Basic precautions include washing hands frequently, covering the mouth when coughing or sneezing and using tissues.

SHORT SERVINGS

Collocated Clubs at Andrews, Bolling - One club now serves military families and guests at both Andrews and Bolling AFBs. The Officers' Club at Andrews closed in November and is now collocated with the Enlisted Club. A year earlier, the enlisted club at Bolling was collocated with the Officers' Club.

VA Names Cemetery - The national cemetery under construction near Pittsburgh has been named National Cemetery of the Alleghenies. The 292-acre site, 35 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, is scheduled to open this summer. It will provide burial options for some 329,000 veterans and their families living within 75 miles of the site.

Prime Premiums Payable from Retired Pay - Uniform Health Care beneficiaries enrolled in Tricare Prime can choose to have premiums taken from their retired pay as an allotment. The three Tricare regional representatives handle all transactions. Go to <http://www.tricare.osd.mil> for your regional contact information.

New Consumer Advocate for Commissaries - Robert Hansgen has succeeded Bonita Moffett as the Defense Commissary Agency's consumer advocate program manager. He helps bring the customer's point of view to the management staff. He can be reached by e-mail at Robert.hansgen@deca.mil.



Gen Eberhart

Admiral Succeeds General Eberhart - Navy Adm. Timothy J. Keating assumed command of North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command from Gen. Ralph E. (Ed) Eberhart at Peterson AFB, Colo. The former director of the Joint Staff is the first non-Air Force officer to command NORAD since its creation in 1958. General Eberhart, completing a 36-year military career, commanded NORTHCOM from its inception following the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

General Changes at NAUS - Retired Army Maj. Gen. William Matz is the new president of the National Association for Uniformed Services. He succeeds retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Dick Murray, who held the post six years. Before his retirement from active duty in 1985, Murray commanded the Army and Air Force Exchange Service. A stalwart in pressing Congress on retiree issues, he has been a popular keynoter at dozens of Air Force Retiree Appreciation Days.

Women's Memorial Marks Anniversary - The Women In Military Service For America Memorial marked its 7th in October. It is the nation's only major memorial honoring servicewomen, past, present and future. It is located at the gateway to Arlington National Cemetery.

Chief Joins DoD Health Affairs - CMSgt. Don Dahlheimer is the senior enlisted advisor for DoD Health Affairs. The 27-year veteran moved from the Surgeon General's staff at Bolling AFB. His duties include communicating needs of enlisted personnel to the Tricare Management Activity leadership.

Berlin Airlift Veterans Remember - The 55th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift had special meaning for 59 former aircrew members during a visit to Rhein-Main AB, Germany. Ceremonies included laying wreaths at a memorial for 85 American, German, French and British service members killed in support of the humanitarian missions.

Retiree Casualty Assistance Checklist - Where is your Casualty Assistance Checklist? It's a must for surviving spouses or next of kin. Copies are available at www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/afretire.cklist.htm. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit the Retiree Activities Office or call for a copy to be mailed to you.

Afterburner Still Available - The Afterburner, News for USAF Retired Personnel is alive and well. It remains available online at www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/afretire. Plans for only electronic transmission were tabled. For non-cyber space readers, mail delivery continues in February, June and October.

Politicos Resign - Secretary of the Air Force James G. Roche and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi have resigned from the Bush Administration. No successor was named for Roche. West Point graduate Jim Nicholson was nominated to head VA.

Commissary Locator Assists Patrons - The locator on the Defense Commissary Agency's Web site, www.commissaries.com, helps patrons maximize their shopping experience. Visitors are taken to the nearest commissary's Web page for complete information on the store.



Nicholson

Former Council Chair Dies - Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Travis R. McNeil, chairman of the Air Force Retiree Council from 1987-1992, died in San Antonio December 11. He was 80. Before his retirement from active duty in 1976, he was the deputy Inspector General.

Space-A Lodging Made Easier - Reservations for up to 30 days in advance are possible under the Air Force Space-A Lodging policy. Accommodations are based on actual and projected occupancy. Toll-free telephone reservations make it even more special. Call 1 888 235-6343.

Medical Records on File - Veterans and next of kin of deceased veterans can submit requests for copies of military medical records from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. Go to www.vetrecs.archives.gov. For more information call 1 866 272-6272.

Another Electronic Move - Active-duty airmen get one less piece of mail now that the Defense Finance and Accounting Service has stopped sending paper leave and earnings statements. The information is available via the service's electronic myPay Web site. Eliminating the paper version saves nearly \$4 million a year in printing and mailing costs.

Thunderbirds Return to Andrews AFB - This year's schedule for the Thunderbirds, Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, includes appearances at Langley AFB, Va., May 14-15 and at Andrews AFB, Md., May 20-22. The Nellis AFB-flying team is an overwhelming favorite on the annual Armed Forces Week open house program at Andrews. The weekend salute to the armed forces normally attracts more than 500,000 persons.

Smithsonian Documents Americans at War - The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History's new exhibit, "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War," is the most comprehensive review of the U.S. military created by the museum. The 18,000 square feet displays artifacts from military conflicts ranging from the 1750s. The exhibit is on permanent display daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is free.

More Funding for Gulf War Illnesses - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has set aside \$15 million in additional research funding for Gulf War illnesses. It is the department's single largest set-aside of research funding for a specific area of investigation. It could constitute up to nearly 20 percent of VA's new research grant awards for FY 2005. Over the past decade, VA has spent more than \$50 million for research into Gulf War illnesses.

AIR FORCE MUSEUM GETS FLYING DOG'S PARACHUTE



USAF Photo by Jeff Fisher

Clarence Steber, left, fastens parachute on a dog mannequin with help of Jerry Miracle at Air Force Museum.

A parachute made for a dog that flew alongside pilots during the Berlin Airlift has been added to the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. His boxer, Vittles, wore the parachute, donated by Clarence Steber, during their flights on C-47s and C-54s to help deliver food to West Berlin. The city had been blocked by the Soviet Union in an effort to force West Berliners to accept communism.

"Throughout the history of the Air Force, animal mascots have provided unit identity and made valuable contributions to esprit-de-corps," said Terry Aitken, the museum's senior curator. "The parachute allows us to tell the story of the Berlin Airlift's mascot and the special bonds between Vittles and the pilots he flew with as a 'crew dog.' It's a wonderful story and already a special hit with our visitors."

"I had a friend in Germany who had a boxer I fell in love with, and he sold him to me," said Steber. Some of his missions required him to be away for two or three days, so he took Vittles with him. Other pilots began to fly Vittles on their missions as well.

Eventually, Gen. Curtis E. LeMay heard about the dog and summoned then-Lieutenant Steber to his office. "Are you the pilot who owns the dog who is flying in our airplanes?" LeMay asked. Steber confirmed he was and LeMay replied, "Without a parachute?" That dog is one of the best morale builders that I've had over here. I want that dog to have a parachute!" Vittles had a parachute that was designed with a static cord that would automatically open in the event of a bail out. Vittles accumulated thousands of flying hours, including 131 missions with Steber, but he never needed to use his parachute. At 6 years old, Vittles contracted a disease and died. The museum exhibit was an immediate hit with children, Steber said. "The kids love it. They see a dog wearing a parachute and they get interested and learn more about this humanitarian airlift," he added.

MUSEUM NAME CHANGE - Location remains at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, but it's now the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force. The new name underscores its status as the official trustee of the Air Force story, confirms the museum's national character and world-class collection and signals its rapidly growing facilities and global visibility, officials said. We have always been the Air Force's national museum, but the Air Force saw this name change as a necessary step to raise the institution to its rightful place," said retired Maj. Gen. Charles D. Metcalf, museum director. The name change comes at a historically and strategically pivotal time of growth for the world's largest and oldest military aviation museum. It encompasses more than 300 aircraft and 17 acres of indoor exhibit space. Recent additions include a 200,000 square-foot Eugene W. Kettering Building housing a Cold War gallery and a 12,500 square-foot missile and space gallery. Future expansion phases include a center to house the museum's presidential aircraft collection.

SPACE HANGAR OPENS AT SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM - The National Air and Space Museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center has opened a new space hangar. Although the Smithsonian's Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Va., opened a year ago, the 53,000-square-foot James S. McDonnell Space Hangar was inaccessible because of refurbishment of its centerpiece, space shuttle Enterprise. Hundreds of other artifacts are in the exhibition hall. An array of cruise missiles, satellites and space telescopes hangs from above. More than 500 smaller artifacts are exhibited in customized cases, including advanced spacesuit prototypes; research crystals formed in orbit; sounding rocket payloads; space-themed toys from the 1950s and 1960s and even borscht in tubes, prepared for Soviet cosmonauts. The oldest artifact, the Ritchey Grinding Machine, dates to the 1890s, when it was used to craft a 60-inch mirror for a Wisconsin observatory telescope. The newest artifact is an engineering model, the PCSat communications satellite launched in 2001 and still in orbit. Since its opening, the Udvar-Hazy Center has attracted more than 1.5 million visitors, making it the most popular museum site in Virginia. Although admission to the Udvar-Hazy Center is free, there is a \$12 fee for parking.

THEATER TICKET PRICES INCREASED - Army and Air Force Exchange Service theater ticket prices were increased in October. It was the first increase in 10 years. Admission prices for adults were boosted \$.50 and \$.25 for children. The admission prices are more than 33 percent lower than the average commercial prices posted on the National Association of Theater Owners Web site. Prices in the continental United States are: adult, \$3.50; child, \$1.75.

GERMANY'S EDELWEISS LODGE AWAITS YOU - The Armed Forces Recreation Center's newest resort has the welcome mat out for military retirees. Located 60 miles from Munich and 35 miles from Innsbruck, Austria, the Edelweiss Lodge delivers an authentic alpine and European adventure. Long revered as one of the most desirable destinations in the Bavarian Alps, Garmisch, Germany, delivers a fusion of cultures, complemented by a selection of amusements just as diverse. These range from European sightseeing opportunities to historical points of interest and classical music festivals. Reservations can be made through a new online service at www.afreurope.com or by calling the Vacation Planning Center at 49-8821-729127.

RESERVES GAIN BONUSES, EDUCATION BENEFITS — Increased education benefits and more flexibility in awarding bonuses are among quality-of-life improvements targeting National Guard and Reserve service members in the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act. The act doubles or triples reserve component bonuses, bringing them closer to active-duty amounts. It allows re-enlistment bonuses to be paid more than once and to be paid in a lump sum. The act also covers an accession/affiliation bonus of up to \$6,000 for reserve officers; changes rules concerning foreign-language proficiency pay and adds a \$2,000 bonus for reserve component service members who convert to a critical skill. Service members who have been activated more than 90 consecutive days receive 40 percent of the active-duty monthly rate under the Montgomery GI Bill, or \$401 a month for those attending school full time. The rate goes up to \$602, 60 percent of the active-duty rate, for those activated more than one year.

TRICARE IMPROVED FOR RESERVISTS - The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal 2005 improves overall health benefits for guardsmen, reservists and their families. It also makes permanent several Tricare benefits authorized "temporarily" under defense legislation, while extending secretarial authorization for others. For reserve component service members with delayed effective date orders to serve on active duty supporting a contingency operation for more than 30 days, the legislation permanently authorizes Tricare eligibility for up to 90 days before the service member's activation date. It also makes permanent a 180-day transitional benefit after deactivation for service members and their families eligible for the transitional assistance management program. Troops also receive a comprehensive physical examination before separating from active duty. The legislation authorizes waiver of the Tricare standard and extra deductibles of reserve component family members for troops ordered to active duty for more than 30 days.



VA DISTRIBUTES LIFE INSURANCE DIVIDENDS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will distribute more than \$449 million in dividends to 1.4 million active policyholders of veterans' life insurance this year. Payments are made on the anniversary date of the policies, with the dividend amount varying according to age, type of insurance and length of time the policy has been in force. Only those with policies that have been kept in force are eligible for the payout. Inaccurate notices periodically surface suggesting that those who have not maintained insurance are eligible for a special dividend. Dividends are automatically sent to eligible policyholders. No application is necessary. Dividends cover only veterans with government life insurance policies who served between 1917 and 1956. Veterans of subsequent eras are covered by VA life insurance programs that do not pay dividends. The dividends represent a return of trust fund earnings on premiums paid by policyholders. They reflect the fact that veterans are living longer than originally predicted. Dividends are also attributable to higher than expected yields earned by trust funds from investments in U.S. government securities. The largest group receiving payments are 1.1 million veterans of World War II with National Service Life Insurance ("V") policies. Total payments are expected to reach \$354.1 million. Dividends totaling \$1.45 million will be paid to nearly 10,000 veterans holding U.S. Government Life Insurance ("K") policies. More than 190,000 Korean War era veterans who maintained Veterans Special Life Insurance ("RS" and "W") policies will receive dividends totaling \$80.7 million. About 49,000 veterans from the World War II era with Veterans Reopened Insurance ("J," "JR" and "JS") policies will share a \$12.9 million dividend. Although VA administers a special life insurance program for disabled veterans and a program offering mortgage life insurance coverage, neither pays dividends. For current active-duty service members and reservists, VA supervises a contract with a private carrier to underwrite Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance. No dividends are paid on Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance, or the version for veterans after military separation, Veterans' Group Life Insurance. Veterans with insurance questions may call the VA Insurance Center at 1 800 669-8477, send e-mail to VAinsurance@vba.va.gov or visit www.insurance.va.gov.

BENEFITS EXANDED FOR EX-POWS – The Department of Veterans Affairs has expanded benefits to all former POWs with strokes and common heart diseases. Those veterans will be automatically eligible for disability compensation for those common ailments, and their spouses and dependents will be eligible for service-connected survivors' benefits if these diseases contribute to the death of a former POW. The decision follows a nationwide outreach effort to identify and provide benefits to an estimated 11,000 former POWs who were not receiving VA disability compensation or other services. There are about 35,000 living ex-POWs. The action adds to the list of 16 medical problems that VA presumes to be linked to the military service of former POWs. For more information, call 1 800 827-1000.

ONGOING EFFORT TO LOCATE POWS, MIAS - The missing persons branch at the Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Tex., continues to account for Air Force prisoners of war and those missing in action. The staff works to bring closure for the families of the 1,600 POW and MIA Airmen lost during the Korean, Cold and Vietnam wars. "We've recently gained access into some areas where the Korean War was fought — a war that happened more than 50 years ago," said MSgt. Cheryl Wells, program manager for the missing persons branch. "It's reassuring to know our government will never give up on its POWs and MIAs." Sergeant Wells wears a silver POW/MIA bracelet to demonstrate her personal commitment. The branch is in frequent contact with family members through regional meetings and national conferences and correspondence.

VA INTRODUCES NEW ID CARD - Combating identity theft, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has designed an identity card for veterans that will safeguard confidential information. The Veterans Identity Card (VIC) has the veteran's photo on the front and identifies him as an enrollee in VA's health care system. Encrypted on a magnetic tape is the veteran's Social Security number, date of birth and a control number. The magnetic strip also records whether the veteran has a service-connected disability. Veterans should request the new card at their local medical center. Processing takes 5-7 days once eligibility is verified. Existing ID cards remain valid until veterans receive their new cards.

VA ENDS EYE SURGERY BY OPTOMETRISTS - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has ended a five-month-old policy that permitted optometrists to perform laser eye surgery at its health care facilities under supervision of ophthalmologists. "The decision is a reluctant one," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "Since experts could not come up with an implementation plan agreeable to both specialties, I chose this path to protect the interest of veterans." Traditionally, ophthalmologists perform eye surgery, while optometrists conduct visual examinations. In VA, health professionals can only perform services identified by professional licenses issued by each state. Oklahoma is the only state that licenses properly trained optometrists in their state to perform laser eye surgery. Last August VA began permitting optometrists with licenses authorizing laser eye surgery to perform those procedures under the supervision of an ophthalmologist. However, a VA panel with representatives from both professions has been unable to reach an agreement on this supervision. VA operates 157 hospitals, 134 nursing homes, 42 residential rehabilitation treatment programs, and 862 outpatient clinics.

OPENINGS IN AIR FORCE ENLISTED VILLAGE – The Air Force Enlisted Village provides housing and financial assistance to surviving spouses of retired Air Force enlisted members. Independent living is offered at Florida's Teresa Village in Fort Walton Beach and Bob Hope Village in Shalimar, close to Eglin AFB and Hurlburt Field. There are a variety of amenities catering to active lifestyles. Hawthorne House, a 64-apartment assisted living residence opens at Bob Hope Village this summer. For more information, call 1 800 248-1413 or visit the web site at www.afenlistedwidows.org.

RUMOR PERSISTS ON NPRC FILES - A false rumor circulating on the Internet, in e-mails, and among veteran service organizations is causing problems at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) where military records are stored. The rumor that military personnel files at the St. Louis center will be digitized and then destroyed is not true. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), parent agency for NPRC, uses electronic scanning to help preserve originals and increase efficiency in handling reference requests. NARA preserves and protects records that were transferred from the military services. They are permanent records that document essential evidence of military service. NPRC stores and services official records for retired, discharged and deceased military personnel. NPRC responds to approximately 4,000 daily requests pertaining to military records, totaling more than 1 million requests each year. Many requests are for separation documents (usually DD Form 214), the majority of which are answered in 10 days or less.

VA AWARDS HOMELESS PROGRAM GRANTS - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded \$31 million in grants as part of its Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program. Recipients are community and faith-based organizations that provide critical services to homeless veterans. Included is \$1.5 million for the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans in Washington, D.C. Thirty-nine programs in 17 states share \$18 million in grants. These first-time "special needs" grants will assist non-profit and faith-based organizations providing services to homeless veterans who are women, caretakers of minor children, elderly, terminally ill or who have a chronic mental illness. Nearly \$13 million goes to VA medical centers to enhance collaboration with the grant recipients assisting those specific homeless populations.

Prescription Primer

By Maj. Joanne Bollhofer-White
11th Medical Group, Bolling AFB

Here are some hints to make the process of turning in a prescription a “snap” at Bolling AFB.

*The patient’s name (as it appears on a military ID), address, phone number and SPONSOR’S Social Security number should be on each prescription. A return-address label helps to reduce the amount of writing. This should be done BEFORE coming to the pharmacy.

*Accurate spelling of the provider that wrote the prescription. This is especially important when coming from a university hospital or an emergency room. These prescription blanks do not have printed provider information. Only prescriptions signed in ink will be accepted. A stamped or electronic signature is not sufficient.

*The PATIENT’S ID card (if over 18). A copy — front and back — is acceptable for proof of eligibility. Prescriptions will be accepted without this, but they MUST be presented when picking up completed prescriptions.

*Prescriptions must be dated. For controlled medications (ex. Tylenol #3, Valium), we will accept orders up to 30 days after the date written. For non-controlled medications, the time frame is up to 90 days. We cannot accept prescriptions soiled with foreign matter, i.e., blood, oil, etc.

Please be courteous and wait until the in-window is clear before approaching. Each patient must have an opportunity to speak privately to the pharmacy staff. You may wait for your prescription in the lobby or come back. Beginning March 1, the Bolling AFB pharmacy will accept refill requests only by phone. By processing refill requests during “off-hours,” we can ensure that current medications continue uninterrupted and that patients with new prescriptions receive prompt attention. Refill requests may be phoned in up to two weeks before current supply is finished. The phone number for refills is (240) 857-7978. Choose option 2 for refills to be picked up from the Bolling pharmacy. Requests received before 5 p.m., Monday through Thursday will be ready for pickup after 10 a.m. the next duty day. Those called in after 5 p.m. on Thursday will be available after 10 a.m. on the second duty day.

Prescriptions originally dispensed from Malcolm Grow, Walter Reed or Bethesda should be refilled at those sites.

TRICARE RETAIL PHARMACY AVAILABLE - The Tricare Retail Pharmacy program offers nationwide prescription services for Tricare beneficiaries in the United States and its territories through a network of more than 53,000 retail pharmacies. Beneficiaries need only to provide their uniformed services identification card to get a prescription filled. While not required, a Tricare retail pharmacy information card helps pharmacies in routing claims. The card was sent to current users of the retail benefit; others can print a card from the retail pharmacy web site www.member.expressscripts.com/dodcustom/home.do. For more information visit www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy or call 1 866 363-8779.

WINTER HIBERNATION OVER - About 25 percent of adults are inactive and more than 60 percent don’t exercise as often as recommended. Fortunately, warmer weather will make it easier for you to get outside and keep that promise you made in January. You can increase the odds you’ll stick with a fitness program by making a commitment to exercise and keeping safety and injury prevention in mind. Choose activities you enjoy. Warm up and stretch beforehand; cool down afterward. Begin your program slowly to allow your body time to adjust to the new activity. Listen to your body; stop exercising if you feel dizzy, short of breath or are in pain. Wear appropriate footwear and protective gear for each activity. Plan fun activities the whole family will enjoy.

HEARING AID PURCHASES AT COST - Tricare programs do not cover hearing aids for retirees or their family members. However, some military facilities support a Retiree at Cost Hearing Aid Purchase Program (RACHAPP) or Retiree Hearing Aid Purchase Program (RHAPP) for retired military personnel. The Military Audiology Association (MAA) list those installations that offer RACHAPP/RHAPP programs. Included are Andrews AFB, Md. (1 888 999-1212) and Walter Reed Army Medical Center, D.C. (202 782-6643). Log on to the following website for a complete list of participating facilities: <http://www.militaryaudiology.org/rachap/state.html>.

KUDOS FOR MEDICARE DISCOUNT CARDS - The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reports that the Medicare Discount Card program is providing the savings it promised. Cost of the card is no more than \$30 annually and, according to CMS, most seniors recoup those costs in about two months. Qualifying low-income Medicare recipients can have an additional \$600 annual subsidy added to the value of their Medicare discount card. Greater savings are earned by using generic pharmaceuticals instead of brand name drugs. About 55 percent of the 209 drug classifications covered by the Medicare Discount Card program have a generic version. The American Enterprise Institute found that the savings for a low-income senior (with the \$600 subsidy) may be between 58-72 percent when purchasing generic drugs by mail. The same person could save between 50-78 percent by buying generic prescription drugs at retail pharmacies with their Medicare discount card. Medicare recipients who have not received a discount card are urged to call 1 800-Medicare or go to www.Medicare.gov to provide your zip code and your prescription drugs. Financial information is needed to qualify for the \$600 subsidy.

DON’T OVERLOOK PNEUMONIA SHOTS - The flu-vaccine craze last fall turned many senior citizens to an often-overlooked vaccine – the pneumonia shot. Called pneumococcal vaccine, it’s normally a one-time shot for anyone 65 or older. It’s not a replacement for a flu shot, but it’s a good backup for complications of influenza. It protects against more than pneumonia. It prevents deadly blood infections and meningitis. Each year the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issues a call for people to get the vaccine, a call that was overshadowed last fall by the flu-shot shortage. The government hopes to have 90 percent of those over 65 vaccinated against pneumococcal disease by 2010. The figure is less than 65 percent today.

SMOKING, STRESS AFFECT BODY - What do a pack of cigarettes and a clenched fist have in common? They are signs of bigger problems. A pack of cigarettes has many detrimental effects on the body. Not only can it cause cancer, but it also increases chances of emphysema, asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia and other respiratory diseases.

“Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States,” said an Air Force spokesman. “And it’s not just smoking; all forms of tobacco use are harmful.” “Children of smokers have a greater chance of developing asthma, frequent colds, bronchitis and ear infections.

Stress is also something people may need help controlling. “We all become stressed to some degree,” the spokesman said. “However we, ourselves, determine the severity of our distress, regardless of the situation or situations contributing to our stress reaction.” Stress management involves knowing when stress is there, what causes the stress and how to deal with the reactions. Some physical signs of stress include rapid heartbeat, muscle constriction, increased breathing and perspiration. Some ways of dealing with stress are to take breaks, participate in recreation activities, talk with others who are supportive, maintain a healthy diet and avoid seeking alcohol and/or drugs as a solution.

WAF BAND STILL MAKING MUSIC



USAF Photo by MSgt. Efrain Gonzalez

Annie Everitt, former WAF Band member, conducts fellow musicians during reunion of band members.

A military band that was formed when the Air Force was 4 years old is still making beautiful music, more than 40 years after the group's deactivation. The Women in the Air Force Band, in conjunction with its annual reunion, performed two concerts to a crowd of more than 1,500 persons at the Texas State Fair in Dallas. Col. George Howard, then chief of bands and music, established the band in 1951 at Lackland AFB, Tex. He picked the group's only commander, Capt. MaryBelle Nissly, a former WAC enlisted Soldier and warrant officer. She selected 235 women during the group's 10-year existence. The band marched in the 1953 inaugural parade for President Eisenhower. It remained at Lackland AFB until 1958 when it moved to Norton AFB, Calif. It was deactivated in 1961. Reunions began in 1997 with 37 people on hand. "We've located 149 of our 235 members and we know 32 are deceased," said Helen McClammy, this year's host. Attendees ranged in age from 62 years old to the group's first chair trombonist, 80-year-old Ann Everitt. The band performed at several Washington functions in Washington in 2001. This year, they will meet near Kansas City, Mo.

RESERVE HANDS OUT DEEP FREEZE MISSIONS - Air Force Reserve Command C-141 Starlifter aircrews end Operation Deep Freeze airlift missions to Antarctica this month. When the new season starts in August, mission responsibility reverts to the 62nd Airlift Wing at McChord AFB, Wash. The Reserve took on the mission four years ago while McChord crews transitioned to the C-17 Globemaster III. Weather conditions are extreme in Antarctica. Summer high temperatures at McMurdo Station average just below freezing. Intense winds can blow ice and snow particles around for days at a time, reducing visibility to near zero. The Operation Deep Freeze season runs August through mid-February. Flying to the coldest, driest and windiest place on Earth requires extensive mission planning. The flight from Christchurch, New Zealand, to McMurdo takes more than five hours.

GUAM SEES GROWTH IN MILITARY FORCES - Guam is expected to become increasingly important to U.S. military operations. Both Andersen AFB in the north and Naval Base Guam in the south anticipate big growth within the next several years, capitalizing on Guam's prime strategic location, its pro-military population, and its status as a U.S. territory. Strategically located more than 3,000 miles southwest of Hawaii, Andersen AFB offers three major attractions: ramp space, green space and airspace. The base offers 7.5 million square feet of ramp space. The Air Force anticipates investing \$1 billion to \$2 billion into Andersen AFB within the next five to 10 years. Regular deployments to Andersen AFB are made by B-52H Stratofortress crews from Barksdale AFB, La., and Minot AFB, N.D.



The C-141 Starlifter, one of the Air Force's most versatile troop and cargo transport aircraft for 40 years, has ended its active-duty tour. The remaining 20 planes are expected to fly with Air Force Reserve Command crews through 2006.

C-141s END ACTIVE-DUTY TOUR - The last two active-duty C-141B Starlifters in the Air Force inventory flew their final missions in September from McGuire AFB, N.J. It marked the end of nearly 40 years of service by C-141s and their crews. Both aircraft will remain in permanent storage at the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz. "If you look at the sum total of its history, it's remarkable," said Gen. John W. Handy, commander of U.S. Transportation Command and Air Mobility Command. "The C-141 has been the backbone of our airlift fleet for the better part of the Military Airlift Command and Air Mobility Command history. If you look at the performance of the C-141, the crews and maintainers who kept them flying are the most significant contribution of that weapons system." McGuire received its first C-141B in 1967. It was the first American purpose-built jet airlifter, and only the second all-jet transport aircraft to see service in the Military Airlift Command. Crews from Air Force Reserve Command units at March AFB, Calif., and Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, will continue to fly the C-141 until the summer of 2006, when the last Starlifter is scheduled to retire. Of 284 Starlifters built for the Air Force between 1963 and 1968, 20 remain in service.

PINS CONSIDERED FOR RETIREE SPOUSES - The Air Force Retiree Branch is seeking to include spouses of Air Force retirees in the popular "pin" program. The 1-inch silver pins are given to spouses of Air Force members in recognition of the sacrifices they make in supporting their marriage partner. A spokesman for the program said, "we are working on a plan to expand the program to include spouses of retirees and veterans who have served our nation." Still to be resolved are the contractual agreement and the additional budget. The program was initially conceived to recognize employers for support of their Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve members called to active duty. A second phase thanked parents of America's airmen. In November, first presentations were made to spouses. "Our goal is to expand the program to include retiree families this year," the spokesman said. The pin is a blue star cradled in the Air Force symbol. Recipients also receive a letter signed by the Secretary of the Air Force and the Air Force Chief of Staff. More than 320,000 parents and 61,000 employers have been recognized. Registration is through a Web-based program at www.yourguardiansoffreedom.com.

TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

Area Code (301/240)	Activity	Area Code(202)
Andrews AFB		Bolling AFB
981-1854	Air Terminal (Pax Svcs)	None
981-0689	Auto Registration	767-5505
735-8100/8102	Bank	624-1091
981-6432	Casualty Assistance	404-3274
981-2111	Chaplain	767-5900
568-3100	Clubs	563-8400
(240) 857-7105	Commissary	767-4695
981-2276	Customer Sv.(DEERS,etc)	767-4440
(240) 857-2806	Dental Clinic	767-5502
(240) 857-4928	Eye Clinic	767-5749
568-2222	Exchange	562-3000
981-7087	Family Support Center	767-0450
981-3998	Finance Office	767-4714
(240) 857-5911	Hospital (Information)	None
981-2276	ID Card renewal	767-4440
981-2042	Legal Assistance (SJA)	767-5297
981-6454	Library	767-5578
981-0785	Lodging	767-5536
(888) 999-1212	Medical Appointments	767-5502
(240) 857-7186	Outpatient Clinic	767-5502
981-5156	Personal Affairs	767-5651
(240) 857-4565	Pharmacy	404-7742
981-4424	Public Affairs	767-4781
981-2726	Retiree Activities Office	767-5244
981-2001	Sec.Police(Non-emergency)	767-4357
981-1854	Space A Travel	None
981-6432	Survivor Benefit Plan	404-3275
981-6161	Telephone Locator	767-4522
981-4413	Tickets & Travel	767-6211
NATIONAL NUMBERS		
DEERS		1 800 538-9552
Ticare		703 681-1775
Senior Pharmacy		1 877 363-6337
Delta Dental		1 888 838-8737
Defense Finance Accounting Service		1 800 321-1080
		/216-522-5534
Social Security		1 800 772-1213
VA Benefits		1 800 827-1000
VA Insurance		1 800 669-8477
Air Force Billeing		1 888 235-6343
Army Billeing		1 800 462-7691